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PP RUEHBC RUEHDH RUEHKUK
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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3769
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001781

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/30/2019
TAGS: IZ PGOV KDEM
SUBJECT: KRG ELECTIONS: IHEC SEEKS TO BALANCE BETWEEN
BAGHDAD AND ERBIL

REF: A. BAGHDAD 1371
     ¶B. BAGHDAD 1702

Classified By: Political Officer Tim Lenderking for reasons 1.4 (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. The Independent High Electoral Commission
(IHEC) has announced the official start of campaign season
just four weeks before the July 25 Election Day on which
voters will select new members of the Iraqi-Kurdistani
Parliament and participate in the first-ever popular election
of the region's president (Ref. A.). Voter registration
ended on June 8, and the IHEC, through its regional office in
Erbil, is scrambling to finalize voter lists, identify
polling centers, train poll workers, and coordinate logistics
for election day. Amid this flurry of preparations, on June
24 the IKP introduced a new twist into the run-up to the
elections - the unexpected passage of a new Kurdistan
Regional Government (KRG) constitution (Ref. B). IHEC is now
under pressure to administer a third electoral event on July
25 - a constitutional referendum. Chairman Faraj Al-Haydari
previously stated that IHEC would "need 60 days for
preparations before holding any referendum in Iraq." As
political pressures build in Kurdistan, the IHEC will have to
find solutions that are likely to set the precedent for
future electoral events in Iraq. End Summary.

The Balance Between Baghdad and Erbil

¶2. (C) IHEC Commissioner Hamdia Al-Hussaini recently moved
to Erbil to serve as IHEC's Chief Electoral Officer for the
KRG elections. Commissioner Al-Hussaini replaced the
embattled former KREO director, Dr. Ali Obeid. Originally
from Babel, she is a Shia and a member of the Da'wa party.
Commissioner Al-Hussaini has served as a member of the IHEC
Board of Commissioners for five years in various capacities,
and when Poloffs met with her, she seemed efficient,
ambitious and ready to take on the challenges of the pending
KRG elections. However, Poloffs also noted her staff is in
some disarray; it seems that the sudden power shift disrupted
elections planning, especially public outreach for the Voter
Registry Update at the beginning of June. All the same,
Commissioner Al-Hussaini seems determined to keep things on
track - and to bring the authority and oversight of Baghdad
into IHEC's operations in Erbil.

¶3. (C) Over the past month, Baghdad-based IHEC Chairman
Faraj Al-Haydari (aligned with KDP) has increased his direct
involvement in the KRG elections planning process. During a
recent two-week trip to Erbil, Chairman Al-Haydari sent a
proposal back to Baghdad that recommended establishing a
separate counting center in the KRG to tabulate the results
of the presidential election (Note: this was likely under
partisan pressure in Erbil. End Note). Sandra Mitchell, head
of UNAMI's Electoral Assistance Team, told Poloffs that the
UN strongly objected to this request. Currently all KRG
votes are set to be tallied at IHEC's Data Entry Center in
Baghdad; political observers from all parties in the KRG are
invited to observe the process. In a meeting with Chairman

Al-Haydari on June 15, Poloffs reiterated support for the
plan to tabulate all results in Baghdad.

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Voter Registration Update
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¶4. (U) The Voter Registration Update was held in the
Kurdistan region from May 25 - June 8, 2009. With roughly
2.5 million eligible voters, the IHEC sought to improve its
voter registration list as much as possible in the three
provinces of the KRG. The update was focused on citizens who
have moved since the last update in July 2007. IHEC
Qhave moved since the last update in July 2007. IHEC
administered voter registration updates at 89 centers in the
KRG (Note: 84 in the three provinces and five in Baghdad.
End note). UNAMI reports that a total of 512,928 people
visited the centers over 180,000 forms were completed. This
means that about 35% of the visitors filled out a form to
update their voter registration information, while the
balance likely discovered that no change was needed. UNAMI
reports that IHEC received only five minor complaints during
the process. IHEC continues to input the updates from the
VRU to prepare the voter lists that will be used on July 25.

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Where To Vote?
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¶5. (C) The IHEC, with support from UNAMI, is in the process
of identifying the sites for the polling centers for the KRG
elections. A provisional list of 1,149 polling center
locations have been finalized by each of the three

Governorate Electoral Offices (GEOs) in the KRG. Poloffs
have learned that some of the proposed polling centers
initially proposed by the Dahuk GEO were actually located in
Ninewa province; UNAMI has discounted this as an error. IHEC
sent special teams to the field to identify the correct sites
and to send new coordinates for each location. The UNAMI
team reports that the final list of sites should be ready
sometime during the first week of July.

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Comment
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¶6. (C) In Baghdad and in Erbil, the IHEC team strives to
meet deadlines and make necessary procurements in time for
the July elections. Poloffs and RRToffs have often witnessed
uncoordinated communication and leadership between IHEC, the
KREO, and the three GEOs in Kurdistan; we note that the
fifteen-person UNAMI Electoral Assistance Team has been
instrumental in keeping these offices synchronized and moving
forward. Amid these challenges, IHEC now faces new pressure
to add a KRG constitutional referendum to plans for the July
25 election day. UNAMI has privately told Poloffs that it is
not technically feasible for IHEC to administer a credible
referendum in less than 60 days. However, it is up to the
IHEC Board of Commissioners to decide whether to risk IHEC's
credibility in an effort to hold the KRG Constitutional
referendum with insufficient planning, or to stand up to the
political pressure in Erbil and deny the request.
HILL